



## NOAA FISHERIES

### Office of Protected Resources

*One of the following criteria must be met for a marine mammal to be considered “stranded”*

- *Dead, whether found on the beach or floating in the water.*
- *Alive on a beach but unable to return to the water.*
- *Alive on a beach and in need of apparent medical attention.*
- *Alive in the water and unable to return to its natural habitat without assistance.*

### Additional Information

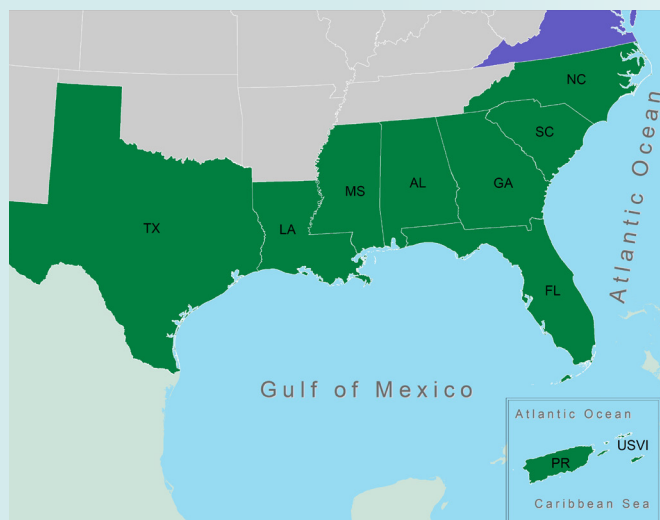
*For additional details, please refer to the 2017 National Report of Marine Mammal Strandings in the United States.*

**Photo (top):** A mass stranding of false killer whales (n=99) along Hog Key in the Florida Everglades. Photo: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.



## 2017 Marine Mammal Strandings Overview: Southeast Region

The U.S. Marine Mammal Stranding Network is comprised of more than 100 organizations from the academic, wildlife rehabilitation, zoo/aquarium, museum, tribe, government, or local emergency response communities authorized to respond to cetaceans (whales, dolphins, and porpoises) and pinnipeds (seals, and sea lions) that are sick, injured, in distress, or dead. These responses are authorized and overseen by NOAA Fisheries' Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.



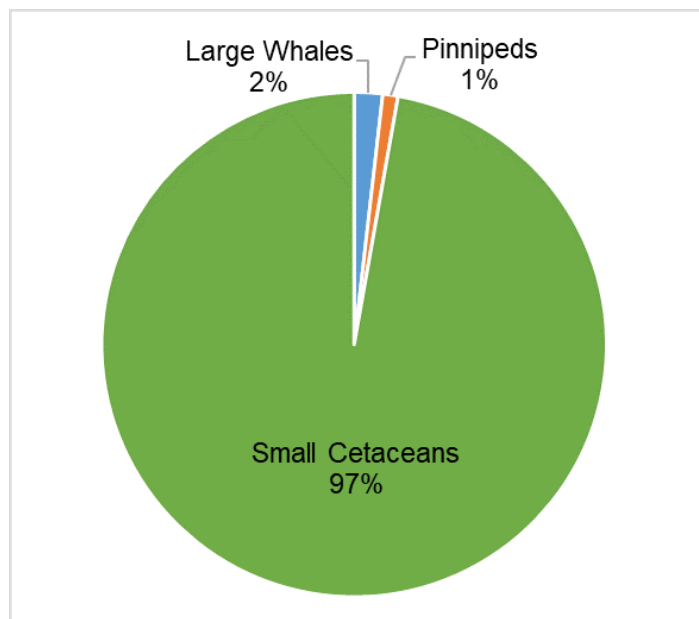
**Figure SER-1.** NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region.

### Southeast Region

The NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region (SER) includes eight coastal states from North Carolina through Texas, as well as the U.S. territories of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (Figure SER-1). This region encompasses approximately 29,952 miles of coastline and includes several large bodies of water (the south Atlantic Coast, Gulf of Mexico Coast, and Caribbean). The region contains some of the most visited coastline in the United States (i.e., Florida), but also some very remote areas. The 771 confirmed marine mammal strandings in the Southeast Region in 2017 is similar to its 11-year (2006-2016) average ( $n=787 \pm 207$ ).

## What Types of Marine Mammals Strand in the SER?

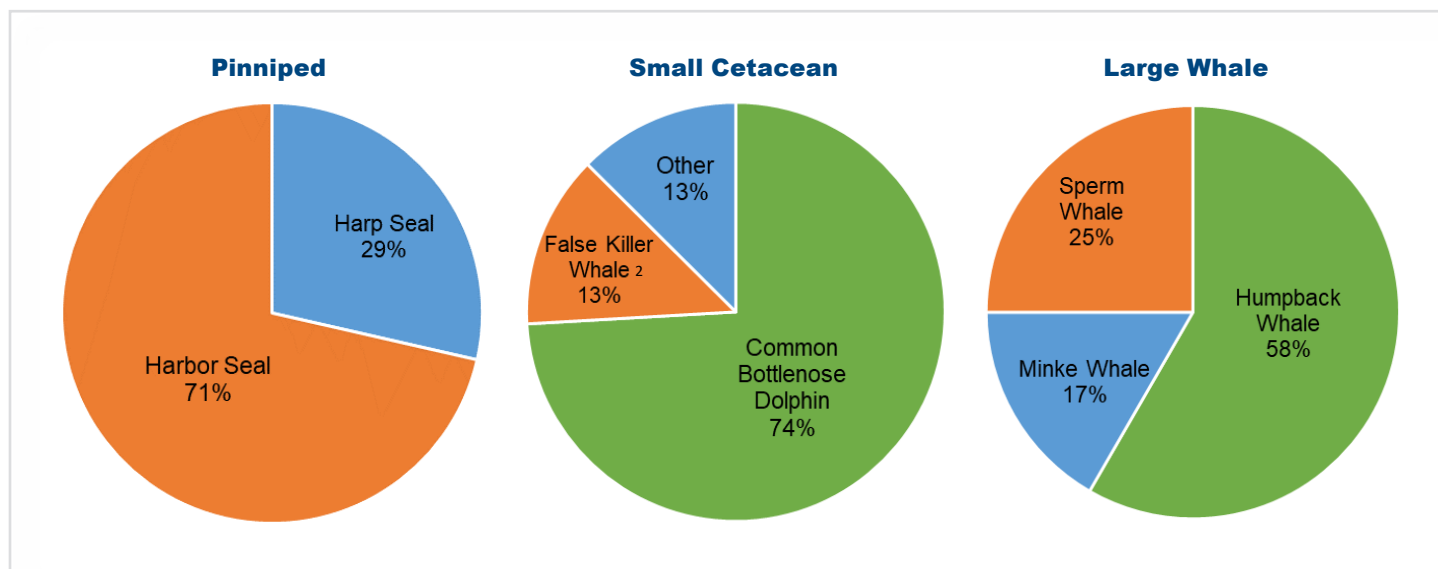
More than 35 different species of marine mammals can be found in the waters of the southeastern United States and the Gulf of Mexico, with the majority of stranding reports involving cetaceans (Figure SER-2). Common small cetacean species include common bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*), Clymene dolphins (*Stenella clymene*), pygmy sperm whales (*Kogia breviceps*), and false killer (*Pseudorca crassidens*) whales (Figure SER-3). In 2017, a mass stranding of false killer whales (n=99) occurred in the region, constituting the largest mass stranding of this species ever recorded in the United States. Large whale species such as humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*), minke whales (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*), and North Atlantic right whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*), are also known to strand, although rarely and in much lower numbers. Seals only occasionally strand in this region, primarily along the mid-Atlantic coast, which is the extent of their range in the Southeast.



**Figure SER-2.** Southeast Region marine mammal strandings, 2017 (n=771). Unknown cetacean (n=10).

**Table SER-1.** Five most frequently stranded marine mammal species in the Southeast Region.

Species	Confirmed Stranding Reports 2017	11-Year Average $\pm$ Standard Deviation <sup>1</sup> (2006-2016)
Common Bottlenose Dolphin	549	633 $\pm$ 182
False Killer Whale <sup>2</sup>	99	3 $\pm$ 1
Pygmy Sperm Whale	17	24 $\pm$ 7
Clymene Dolphin	14	2 $\pm$ 1
Short-finned Pilot Whale	13	19 $\pm$ 17



**Figure SER-3.** Southeast Region marine mammal strandings, by species, 2017 (n=771). Pinnipeds (n=7), small cetaceans (n=741), large whales (n=13), and unknown cetacean (n=10).

<sup>1</sup> A standard deviation is a measure used to quantify the amount of variation within a set of values.

<sup>2</sup> This species was involved in one mass stranding event along Hog Key in the Florida Everglades.

**Table SER-2.** A breakdown, by species, of the small cetaceans categorized as other in the above figure (n=93).

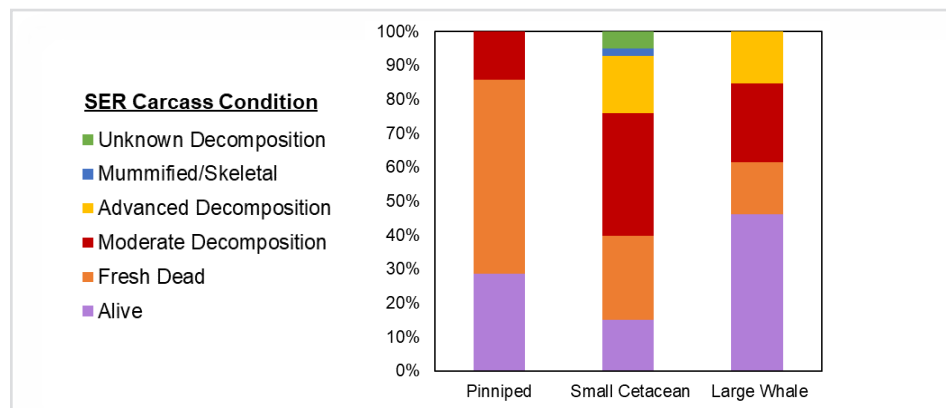
Species of "Other" Small Cetaceans	Confirmed Number of Strandings, 2017
Pygmy Sperm Whale	17
Clymene Dolphin	14
Short-finned Pilot Whale	13
Dwarf Sperm Whale	7
Fraser's Dolphin	5
Melon-headed Whale	4
Risso's Dolphin	3
Atlantic Spotted Dolphin	2
Striped Dolphin	2
Cuvier's Beaked Whale	2
Gervais' Beaked Whale	2
Blainville's Beaked Whale	1
Harbor Porpoise	1
Rough-toothed Dolphin	1
Spinner Dolphin	1
Unidentified	18

## When Did SER Marine Mammals Strand in 2017?

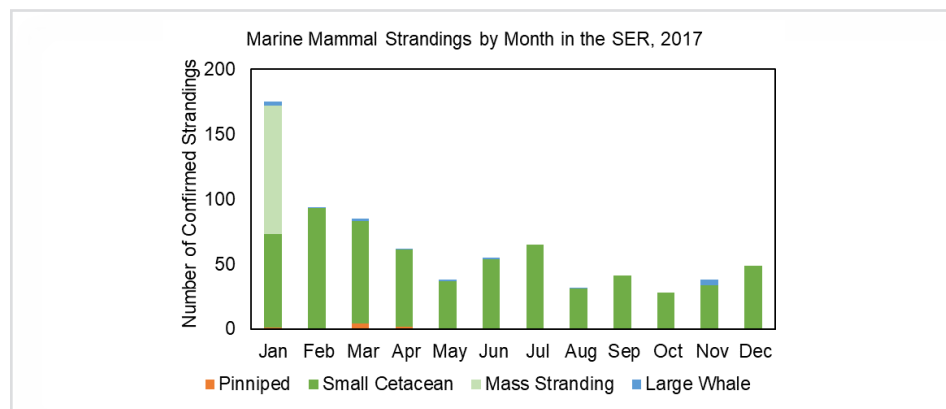
In the Southeast Region a number of year-round resident stocks of common bottlenose dolphins live in bays, sounds, and estuaries, as well as seasonally resident and transient stocks. Other cetacean species are also routinely present. In 2017, stranding events occurred throughout the year (Figure SER-5), but strandings were elevated in January as a result of the mass stranding of false killer whales (n=99) in Hog Key Bay, Florida. Stranding events were also higher in February and March, which coincided with the calving season for some stocks of common bottlenose dolphin.

## Are Marine Mammals in the SER Stranding Alive or Dead?

Although the majority of marine mammals that strand in the Southeast are found dead, a small proportion (18 percent) of animals stranded alive in 2017 (Figure SER-4). Based on the recommendations of authorized veterinarians or professionals, a handful of live animals were transported to rehabilitation facilities; others were poor candidates for rehabilitation and needed to be euthanized. In some cases, live animals undergoing rehabilitation were deemed non-releasable, and NOAA Fisheries moved them to permanent managed care facilities. As so few seals strand in this area, there are no rehabilitation centers for pinnipeds in the Southeast Region, so pinniped rehabilitation candidates are transferred to facilities within the Greater Atlantic Region. Of the animals transferred to rehabilitation facilities in 2017 (n=13), 15 percent (n=2) were released.



**Figure SER-4.** Observation status of confirmed marine mammal strandings in the Southeast Region, 2017.



**Figure SER-5.** Seasonality of marine mammal strandings in the Southeast Region, 2017.

## What Types of Unusual Mortality Events Were Occurring in the SER?

There were two large whale Unusual Mortality Events (UMEs) declared in 2017 involving humpback whales and North Atlantic right whales. Elevated numbers of humpback whale mortalities occurred along the Atlantic coast from Maine through Florida. A portion of the whales showed evidence of pre-mortem vessel strike; however, this finding was not consistent across all humpback whales examined. In 2017, elevated numbers of North Atlantic right whale mortalities were documented, primarily in Canada and some in the United States, which necessitated an UME declaration, especially given the critically endangered status of the population. Preliminary findings indicate human interactions, specifically vessel strikes or entanglements as the cause of death for the majority of the North Atlantic right whales. More information about UMEs is available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-mammal-protection/marine-mammal-unusual-mortality-events>.



# What Can Members of the Public Do?



Responders collect important biological data from a stranded pilot whale. Photo: NOAA Fisheries/Sarah Wilkin.

## Southeast Regional 24/7 Hotline

The Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program relies on reports of stranded marine mammals by the public. If you come across a stranded marine mammal please report it to your Southeast regional 24/7 hotline.

**Hotline: (877) 942-5343**

## Reporting a Stranding

The most important information to collect includes the:

- Date
- Location of stranding (including latitude and longitude)
- Number of animals
- Condition of the animal (alive or dead), and
- Species (if known)

Photos or videos (from a safe and legal distance) can also provide valuable information to network responders. Only trained and permitted responders should approach or pick up a stranded marine mammal. You can also download the Dolphin & Whale 911 Stranding App in the Apple Store to help report a stranding.

## Getting Involved

The National Stranding Network relies on government, private, and public support to conduct its vital work to save animals in distress and understand causes of injuries and mortalities. You can make a difference by contacting your local Stranding Network (list available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/report>) to see how you can get involved.

*Only trained and permitted responders should approach or pick up a stranded marine mammal.*

*Only confirmed stranding activities involving species under the jurisdiction of NOAA Fisheries (cetaceans and pinnipeds, except walrus) are used in this report. All data were taken from the National Stranding Database and filtered accordingly. Any duplicate events, and entries of entangled large whales, were removed from the following analyses. All data and information described within this report are correct as of October 25, 2019. All photographs were taken under Stranding Agreement, Section 109(h) authority, or permit.*



U.S. Secretary of Commerce  
**Gina Raimondo**

Acting Under Secretary of Commerce  
for Oceans and Atmosphere  
**Benjamin Friedman**

Acting Assistant Administrator for  
Fisheries  
**Dr. Paul Doremus**

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National Marine Fisheries  
Service

Office of Protected Resources 1315  
East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD, 20910